

# **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT RECORD EASTERN INTERIOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

***Meeting Location:*** Fairbanks, Alaska

***Meeting Date:*** April 22, 2008

***Purpose:*** Identify public issues and concerns with BLM managed lands in the Planning Area.

***Number of public in attendance:*** 49

***BLM personnel in attendance:*** The following BLM personnel were at either the meeting or the open house.

Lenore Heppler (Field Office Manager)  
Bob Schneider (District Manager)  
Jeanie Cole (Planning)  
Collin Cogley (Recreation and Forestry)  
Randy Goodwin (Travel Management)  
Ruth Gronquist (Wildlife and Weeds)

Holli McClain (Recreation and Visual  
Resource Management)  
Kristin Mull (Fisheries)  
Doug Stockdale (Public Affairs)  
Vic Wallace (Realty)  
Nancy Wicker (Realty)

## ***Meeting format:***

**3-6 pm:** Open house with maps and other information on display. BLM staff discussed maps with the public and answered questions. The public had the opportunity to review maps of land status, PLO locations (mineral entry), Recreation opportunity spectrum, and OHV designation in the Steese and White Mountain subunits, fire management options, and wildlife habitat and game management units.

**6-8 pm:** Attendees were introduced to why we are doing a new RMP, what an RMP does, and given examples of decisions that might come out of an RMP through a power point presentation. BLM staff answered questions. Participants were asked to express their concerns and issues with BLM-managed public lands. Eleven people provided oral comments. These are summarized below.

**Handouts:** An Interested Party letter explaining the types of decisions made in the RMP and giving an overview of the initial steps in planning and a small-scale map of the planning area were available for the public to take. In addition, copies of several existing plans covering the area were available including: the Steese National Conservation Area (NCA) RMP, White Mountains National Recreation Area (RNA) RMP, Fortymile Management Framework Plan, the Fortymile, Birch Creek and Beaver Creek wild and scenic river management plans, the Proposed RMP/Final EIS for the Steese NCA, and the Proposed RMP/Final EIS for the White Mountains NRA. Several BLM brochures such as OHV management, 17b easements, and the White Mountains Winter Trails were available. A scoping comment sheet that could either be filled out at the meeting or returned to BLM at a later date was also available.

## ***Issues/Questions/Concerns:***

### **Mining**

There are numerous federal mining claims in the planning area. Federal mining claimants need to be ensured that they will be allowed to continue to operate and additional restrictions will not be put in place that will prohibit or prevent these operators from developing or mining their claims.

Threats to water quality in the Black River and Salmon Fork from mining should be taken into consideration.

There should be a map that shows mineral resources and energy resources in the planning area. This would help the public understand what possible developments could result with changes to land management.

### **ANCSA (d)(1) Withdrawals**

There should be in depth and case-by-case analysis when considering removing the ANCSA (d)(1) withdrawals. There should be case-by-case analysis of each area that is going to have the (d)(1) withdrawn or changed as opposed to blanket withdrawal removal or analysis. For each area, information should be given to the public about how it is to be done. There should be facts and predictions about the impacts of the new activities that would be allowed and how these would affect people and the land.

Modifying or removing the (d)(1) withdrawals: There needs to be an assessment of the impacts either in the plan or in some other fashion before the withdrawals are altered. It needs to be evaluated and dealt with rather than just changing the situation without public involvement.

We are extremely concerned that there is really no cumulative analysis of impacts of revoking the (d)(1) withdrawals on a statewide basis. Recommendations for revoking withdrawals should be done on a case-by-case basis with the specific cumulative impacts analysis of how that would affect surrounding lands, communities, and wildlife. Instead of what we have seen in a lot of the other planning areas, which is a blanket approach and a recommendation to lift all of the withdrawals. In this area there are eight million acres withdrawn and about eight million acres will be recommended to be opened. I understand that there are areas where development will happen and there are areas where development can happen but unless you have a real cumulative analysis, it will be hard to determine where development is appropriate. Especially for lands that have been closed to mineral entry for nearly forty years.

### **General comments**

The watershed areas need to be protected and the potential impacts to them really need to be examined.

Impacts to migratory wildlife, migration routes, their habitat, and the subsistence uses of wildlife and fish need to be considered and analyzed.

Global warming should be right at the top of BLM's management chart. Global warming, what is going to change? Do you have a way of even measuring what might change? It will be an important management consideration in the years to come.

BLM needs to look at cumulative impacts and what is going on in adjacent areas that might affect the management schemes on BLM lands.

## **Fortymile River**

The miners were in the Fortymile before BLM got there. Management has been a real balancing act and things could have gone a lot worse than they have.

The designation of the Fortymile National Wild and Scenic Rivers was largely due to the efforts of a BLM employee (now retired). He personally worked very hard to get that protection. He was probably thinking along the lines of both the historic values along the Fortymile River as well as its recreational values and from a standpoint of vision, of seeing the BLM grow into becoming a more proactive land steward of the public lands. I look forward to similar professional efforts on the part of BLM through this planning process to take these responsibilities for public land stewardship to the next level.

We support the continued strong management of the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River for its wild values and encourage BLM to continue to work things out with the State to avoid incompatible activities that may harm the water quality.

The focus on the Fortymile area should be on the exceptional river values that exist there. It has started to shift a lot over the years to mining and we know that there is a lot of activity there. But the focus should be on the exceptional river values.

## **Black River**

BLM has limited data on the Black River. BLM needs more inventory data before developing a plan for the Black River. Planning for the Black River area should be delayed until BLM has completed more studies.

The Black River should be covered under a separate plan as it is very different from the other parts of the planning area.

The Black River area is really a different area from the standpoint of inventory, previous regulations, and planning process. It is a frontier area and BLM may want to treat the Black River quite differently from the other areas, possibly even put it on a separate planning process and with a different time frame because of the need for better inventory and background data collection for the upper Black River.

It is very important that we protect the Black River area for fish, wildlife habitat, and subsistence uses.

People living in the area depend on the Black River for subsistence to a significant degree. The watershed of the Salmon Fork of the Black River is very rich area in terms of wildlife and fish. It provides a subsistence base for people of Chalkyitsik. These things need to be taken into consideration in developing a management plan for the Salmon Fork of the Black River. It is a significant spawning stream for two species of salmon: chum and coho. There is also historic documentation of king salmon spawning

populations in the Salmon Fork of the Black River. Currently the population of King salmon is very low but that does not mean it cannot rebound. The fall chum run is very strong and the people of Chalkyitsik depend on that fall chum run to meet some of their subsistence needs. In the fall people in Chalkyitsik set nets under the ice for coho salmon and that is important too. Those fish that they are catching in Chalkyitsik are spawning in the Salmon Fork, in the main stem as well as a tributary of a tributary of the Salmon Fork.

The Fishing Branch at the headwaters of the Porcupine River in Canada is similar to the Salmon Fork. It is in the same geographic area with similar hydrology and geology, where there is an upwelling under a bluff and the water remains unfrozen all winter long. Salmon spawn in there until late into December and there are wildlife, furbearers and bears that are plentiful in both locations. Historically, both areas have been extremely important areas for the native people.

It is critical that the salmon spawning hole in Alaska [Salmon Fork] receives similar protection to the protection that the Canadians and the First Nation of Old Crow has provided to the salmon spawning hole over in the Canadian side [Fishing Branch].

The Salmon Fork of the Black River should be studied for designation as an ACEC. If not that, then a natural research area at the very least.

The Salmon Fork of the Black River is important salmon spawning area and people from Chalkyitsik catch fish on their way up to that area. It is important to realize as well that the salmon that spawn there go all the way to the Bering Sea and the North Pacific Ocean so those spawning areas are part of the support for a broader interest in salmon resources that go beyond the local use. The Yukon River Salmon International Agreement with Canada regarding Yukon River Salmon should be acknowledged and dealt with appropriately in the plan.

It is important to think about how BLM is doing planning and what work has been done with the subsistence, cultural, historical, sacred, fish and wildlife, and vegetation resources in the Black River area. Consider how to do it so that BLM gets the best information. There may need to be full-blown studies in order to accomplish the goals. Without this information, any talk of changing the management from how it is today might be quite hard.

It would be prudent to take a hard look at the inventory of wildlife in the Black River area. There has not been a very thorough inventory in that area. By taking an inventory this late in the game, BLM may potentially miss some wildlife that occurred in the area historically but are not occurring there now. Populations may rebound and come back into that area but since there has not been a strong maintenance of wildlife you would just sort of skip those species that have lived there in the past such as Dall sheep.

In relation to the Black river area specifically, BLM needs to take a long hard comprehensive look at that area and work to determine cultural and historical significance of that use or of that area, biological significance. It is crucial the livelihoods of the people who live there now, as it has been for thousands of years. And any disturbance to that area or any shortsighted planning would be detrimental to the people that depend on the resources there.

BLM should consider the Black River area for special protection, designations. If you do a comprehensive approach you will find that the values that are found in that area warrant special protection.

There is a healthy furbearer population, very healthy moose population and very healthy bear population and a lot of that is dependant upon the health of the stream itself. So anything that affects the health of the stream, the water quality of stream can affect the success and productivity of salmon.

## **Wilderness**

Currently talk of wilderness designation is off the table but things can change. BLM would be well served if they think about protecting the Salmon Fork watershed. Eventually we may be able to consider wilderness designation for that area.

## **Caribou**

The planning area includes important wintering grounds of the porcupine caribou herd and it needs to be protected.

The range boundary for the Porcupine Caribou Herd on the wildlife map at the meeting needs to be reviewed. It does not include a significant wintering area for porcupine caribou. Accurate range depictions for wildlife should be used during the planning process.

BLM needs to consider how sensitive some of these caribou herds are. The Fortymile herd used to be almost 500,000 caribou. So BLM needs to keep an eye on and keep in touch with just how sensitive populations are and how they can change drastically with plans.

## **Trans-boundary impacts with Canada**

Over in Canada there is the Fishing Branch area, it is right on the other side of the border. If you do not map that other side of the border you are not going to know how the whole ecosystem interacts and why it is so important.

## **White Mountains**

BLM has done a good job managing the White Mountains and balancing competing uses. The White Mountains are one of the most visible things around Fairbanks that people participate in and everyone appreciates it being there.

The White Mountains is in Fairbanks backyard. BLM needs to take a hard look at how to protect the area so that in fifty years, we have what we have today.

BLM should maintain the current primitive management status in the White Mountains.

We do not want to see any new roads, rights-of-way, or utility corridors through the White Mountains.

The current EIS submitted by Doyon and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, discusses putting a road through the White Mountains, down Victoria Creek. The BLM should not allow that road to go through because it will affect Dall sheep and caribou that cross the creek. Allowing a road down Victoria Creek would impair the ecosystem and infringe upon the enjoyment of the public. Also, Beaver Creek still runs clean compared to Birch Creek which runs polluted.

When the existing conservation plan was developed for the White Mountains a more conservative policy should have been taken with regards to the use of off-road vehicles during the summer time. The BLM is well aware of some of the damage and problems that have developed by allowing off-road vehicles to be used in the summer time in sensitive tundra areas. BLM has done a significant amount of work to rehabilitate and stabilize some of these areas. In hindsight, a more protective, restrictive policy would have been wiser for that area. During this new planning process BLM needs to consider what they have learned on summer use of ATVs in tundra areas. We should try to prevent impacts to the land, vegetation, soil, and water that we know happens when these vehicles are allowed to run in the summer time without adequate restrictions.

Maintaining the natural quality of Beaver Creek and the natural migratory movements of the Dall sheep and the caribou is important.

I strongly support the protection of the Victoria Creek area, keeping that a pristine area.

As far as new trail designations or new motorized activities or new trails in general I would like to see the area pretty much stay status quo. What I have heard from BLM is that there is a pretty good idea of use and impacts and it seems to be kind of working. I would like to see it managed pretty much in the same fashion as now but with a primitive sort of outcome.

## **Off-road vehicles**

BLM should take a close look at any lands where you do not have regulations in place regarding the weight of off-road vehicles and consider restricting the weight of off-road vehicles in any area where you do not have that regulation at this time. People are familiar with some rather serious damage that was done a few years ago in the Mosquito Flats area. When it came to implementing some law enforcement it would have been more effective if there were adequate regulations in place on that area. The planning process should address any deficiencies along that line.

Too often we want to use a definition of denial and call it management. Denied access to any of that area by any specific means other than something ridiculous like a piece of heavy equipment is not managing.

The weight of the piece of equipment does not necessarily directly and proportionately equal the impact that it has. What we are talking here is individual attitude. Attitude of use is directly proportional to damage.

The 1500 GWV rating was based on footprint pressure of the particular types of vehicles of that time frame (early 1980s). Not on the total weight necessarily that the vehicle displaced. The footprint pressure that was used at that time was less than a snow machine track, even by today's standards with the wide long tracks, would exert on the tundra. I have hunted that area since the late 70s and I would defy a person to follow me given 30-45 minutes of recovery time of where my vehicle rolled over the tundra. But you take any young person or any person period with a bad attitude and a big go fast four-wheeler that wants to show off and see if he can make it through the mud bog and get stuck or not has a definite attitude that he does not give a darn about what damage he occurs. How to you manage that? You cannot.

Try to come up with some sort of a solution that will allow folks that need ATVs (all terrain vehicles) to enjoy that countryside to still be able to do it. None of us advocate that the whole thing be blown wide open. I think it is rather good we have the one river basin up there where no ATVs are allowed. The animals need a place to get away from that impact.

Established trails are the worst thing in the world. Because they force people to go over the same terrain time and time again, causing damage, regardless of how he uses his vehicle to traverse the area. Most of that area up there is so fragile, you can run 200 bicycles nose to tail over the same piece of ground, and you are going to see the impact.

User attitude is everything and please take that into consideration when you decide on these things because we know from decisions made 20 odd years ago that whichever one you chose is going to be use carte blanche throughout BLM in Alaska. So it impacts more than just what we are looking at in this little area on your maps.

## **Public Input and Planning Process**

There needs to be meetings and participation in bush areas. BLM should involve the whole community in different places when they hold meetings. In the land exchange meetings that Fish and Wildlife Service held, about 160 people came out in Fort Yukon to speak. Everyone is really concerned about what was going to happen to the land.

Folks that live a subsistence lifestyle out in these areas need to be able to participate in this process in a clear and concise manner. An interpreter, that is okay with the local community, needs to be used so that the elders can be involved and pass along their ideas, thoughts, and concerns. Sometimes the elders are not well represented in the comments.

There should be meetings with tribal governments in all the villages that are within the planning area. Such meetings would provide very valuable information that BLM could retain and use.

BLM needs to work closely with local people to identify the cultural, historical, and spiritual information about the area and involve people in the process in a way that people feel comfortable with, such as a visual method with interpretation.

It is very hard to respond in the scoping process without more information. BLM needs to provide more information during scoping, including a better sense of the mapped

information, what the current plans says, and what the resources are. This information needs to be provided in a way that is easy to understand.

There should be a second round of post scoping meetings before BLM really gets into developing alternatives, before things are set in stone. When BLM has more information pulled together, come back and talk to the public again. Go to each of these communities and share your picture of what is there and how it is managed now. It would evoke a lot more information about future management.

Maps should be posted on the website. These maps should be a scale that looks good on the screen but small enough to download quickly. You can have another quality of maps for printing. That would really help people. Then follow up with the people who came to these meetings and all the communities, send them a book that is this stuff that you have put together before you have this next round of scoping meetings. But do not have meetings in the summer.

Each of these four areas deserves a separate plan. ANILCA required that the White Mountains and the Steese each have their own plan. Maybe it was only the first plan had to be a separate plan, but it was a good practice. These areas have different mandates and different people know different things about them and have different concerns. Additionally, the Fortymile River and the Black river areas are also very different. It would be a lot more effective to separate them.

If the plan has four alternatives for each area, there will be a matrix of 16 different alternatives potentially and how do you combine them? It is overwhelming for the reviewer.

There should not be a cookie cutter approach where every alternative is just lift the d-1 withdrawals or as primitive management. Actually, we would love to see primitive management for most of the area. There are site-specific things that will be different in each area and it will be overwhelming for the public to deal with them in this complicated matrix. BLM will not get the type of public comment and information that is needed.

The land status map should show detailed land status including: village corporation lands, tribal lands, regional corporation lands, and dual selected lands. It is helpful for people to see those conflicts to help think about what might happen in the future.

I would like to see information get out to communities well in advance of comment deadlines. One of the things we often see is when a draft of a plan comes out, it will come out halfway through the comment period with a 30-day review. In many cases, it will get there even later than that. BLM needs to really take into consideration how long it takes to get documents out to a village or rural community. And give people an adequate opportunity to really analyze what is in these documents because it is complex information.

I really appreciate the effort that goes into the mapping information. But the more up to date those can be, the more descriptive those maps can be, the better opportunity the public will have to understand some of the conveyance issues and some of the planning areas.



As far as comment deadlines when we get to that point on this plan the BLM needs to really take into consideration and be respectful of local customs such as hunting season. The final Bay Plan was released on December 7<sup>th</sup> with a 30-day comment period when there were three major holidays in the Bay region. Nothing will draw more skepticism against the motives of BLM. In that case, it may have just been on a bad timing, but BLM should really look hard at local celebrations that are happening, hunting seasons and plan your schedule accordingly.